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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to examine the sex role attitudes of typical college students before and after a 15-week sex roles class. A questionnaire consisting of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), a modified form of the Attitudes Toward Women Scale, and 34 questions concerning sex-role attitudes and beliefs was administered to students in psychology of sex roles classes and to controls in non-sex role psychology classes. The questionnaire was given to different classes both before and after each semester over a 7-year period between 1982 and 1989. Findings from approximately 430 subjects showed no significant differences between controls and experimental subjects before the course began. Pretest scores revealed gender differences in that men showed more maleness on the BSRI than did women and men were more conservative or traditional and women were more liberal on the Attitudes Toward Women Scale. For experimental subjects, female students' attitudes on the Attitudes Toward Women Scale changed toward more liberal sex-role attitudes after taking the sex roles class. Male students' attitudes did not change significantly after taking the course. All analyses for control subjects showed no significant differences between pre- and post-test scores. (NB)

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"CHANGING SEX ROLE ATTITUDES WITH EDUCATION: CAN IT BE DONE?"

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Sex role stereotypes have typically tended to have a general devaluing effect for women and womens' roles.

Several studies have specifically tried to change sex role attitudes through educational experiences, but the results have been ambiguous (Clary, 1985, Richer, 1988.) It has generally been believed that strongly held beliefs concerning such controversial issues as abortion, parenting roles, the Equal Rights Amendment and child care would not change with the mere presentation of information in an educational setting.

Thus, the goal of the present study was to examine the sex role attitudes of typical college students before and after a 15 week sex roles class. We were interested in questions about the degree that formal education can change attitudes and beliefs about sex-roles, such as attitudes about child rearing, the Equal Rights Amendment or male-female relations. To the degree that attitudes towards females can be made more positive, women will have higher self images and be helped in a variety of ways.

Method

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A sex-role attitude questionnaire was administered to students enrolled in several classes on the psychology of sex roles and to controls in non-sex role psychology classes at a small state university in Texas. The questionnaire was given to different classes both before and after each semester over a 7 year period between 1982 and 1989. The questionnaire consisted of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974), a modified form of the Attitudes Towards Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1972) and 34 additional questions concerning sex-role attitudes and beliefs. In addition, demographic information was obtained. The questionnaires were completed anonymously, using codes to match the first and second administration of the questions to the appropriate subject.

The Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) is a questionnaire developed to allow people to describe themselves in accordance with sex-typed stereotypes of characteristic behavior for men and women. The masculine scale rated subjects on a male stereotype of being aggressive, ambitious, athletic, dominant, independent, self reliant, risk taking and forceful. The feminine scale rated subjects on a feminine stereotype of being affectionate, compassionate, gentle, gullible, shy, tender, understanding and warm.

The Attitude Towards Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1972) measured beliefs about appropriate roles of women in society, ranging from very conservative or traditional roles to very liberal or profeminist roles.

The additional questions measured agreement or disagreement with a range of attitudinal questions such as, "After I complete school, I

would like a job or career which has responsibility and demands a lot of me"; "Assuming that I get married, I would like my husband or wife to have a job or career which pays well"; "I would describe myself as one who attempts to master situations"; "Women should always take the passive role in courtship"; "A US Constitutional equal-rights amendment for women should be passed."

The sex roles course examined male and female roles from a psychological perspective. The course studied the sex role socialization process, stereotyping, discrimination, communication styles, and additional relevant topics. The control classes were several psychology undergraduate courses in other topic areas, such as introductory and social psychology which did not deal directly with sex role issues.

Results

Approximately 430 subjects were questioned over a seven year period from 1982 to 1989. Approximately 70% were females and 30% were males. Most of the subjects were between 20 to 40 years of age with a mean age about 29 years. Data were gathered at the beginning of class (pre measure) and at the end of each class, 15 weeks later (post measure).

Statistical analysis of the data was done using multiple discriminant analysis, analysis of variance and Chi Square analysis.

Were there any differences in sex role attitudes between controls and the experimental sex role classes before the start of the study? All analyses showed no significant differences between controls and

experimental Ss before the start of the study. Hence, control and experimental Ss held the same attitudes at the start of the study.

What is the effect of the sex of the subject on sex role attitudes?

Multiple discriminant analysis indicated that males and females were significantly different in their sex role attitudes at the beginning of the study. Men showed more maleness on the Bem Sex Role Inventory then females. Men were more conservative or traditional and women were more liberal on the Attitude Towards Women Scale.

Did exposure to sex-roles classes change sex roles attitudes of students compared to those exposed to control classes?

Experimental students (sex role classes) were compared on pre and post measures to determine whether there were any changes in attitudes comparing all the attitudes pre measure to all the attitudes post measure. Multiple discriminant analysis indicated a trend toward significance, and Analysis of Variance and Chi Square analysis showed several significant differences between pre and post measures on specific questions.

However, when sex-role attitude changes were examined for differential responses of male versus female subjects, a very definite pattern emerged.

Female student's attitudes on the Attitude towards Women Scale changed towards more liberal sex-role attitudes after taking the sex roles class. Male student's attitudes did not change significantly after taking the course. Further, female students post-course felt that

women's liberation helps relations with men more than they did pre-course. Post- course female students expected women to be less dutiful towards husbands than they did pre-course. They also expected more freedom like men and felt women can do more jobs and still be feminine after they had completed the sex roles course. Female students approved changing the form of marriage, approved child rearing without sex-role stereotyping, approved the Equal Rights Amendment and approved ending sex differentiated education more post-course than they did before they took the sex roles course.

However, male students did not change their attitudes on the Attitudes towards Women scale or the Bem like the women did after taking the sex-roles course. Further, the only statistically significant attitude difference the men showed post-course was that men felt that women can do more jobs and still be feminine. There were several other trends in a liberal direction which were not significant.

Thus, almost all the significant attitude changes in the sex role course occurred in the female students. These women became more liberal in many attitudes, whereas, the men were hardly affected.

The control classes were also analysed for pre to post course changes. All analyses showed no significant differences between pre and post course measures. Thus, there did not seem to be any attitude differences occurring just from being in general psychology classes at this time. This lack of difference was expected from the controls and verifies that the significant differences between pre and post course measures which occurred in the sex roles classes really reflected some

meaningful changes in attitudes which occurred as a result of exposure to new ideas and information in the sex role area.

Discussion

This study showed that men and women have different sex role attitudes. Women basically favor attitudes which benefit women more than men do. That is, women are typically more pro-women's liberation, favor women's rights and equality in hiring and opportunities more than men. This makes commen sense, as usually groups favor attitudes which help themselves.

This study found that sex roles attitudes and stereotypes can be changed with appropriate experiences, although more deeply held personality characteristics or identities are probably less likely to change. The female subjects in this study showed more liberal and profeminine attitudes towards women after completing a sex roles course than they did before the course was taken. Also there were only a few liberal changes in men after taking the sex roles course, but nowhere as many as in the women. Thus this study showed that sex role attitudes were amenable to positive change, although in this case almost all the significant attitude changes in the sex roles course occurred in the female students, with little change in the men's attitudes.

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